

Diminishing the Discipline Gap: Restorative Justice as a Promising Alternative in One Urban School

Polly Long, M.S.
Susan Davies Ed.D.



INTRODUCTION

The education system is responding to student misbehavior with zero tolerance policies that adversely affect students, schools, and society by mandating out-of-school suspension for minor and major behavioral infractions.

Zero tolerance policies have contributed to the “discipline gap,” wherein schools punish racial and ethnic minorities more often and more severely than they punish whites.

One alternative to zero tolerance policies is restorative justice, which aims to foster respect, responsibility, and empathy in members of school communities.

METHODS

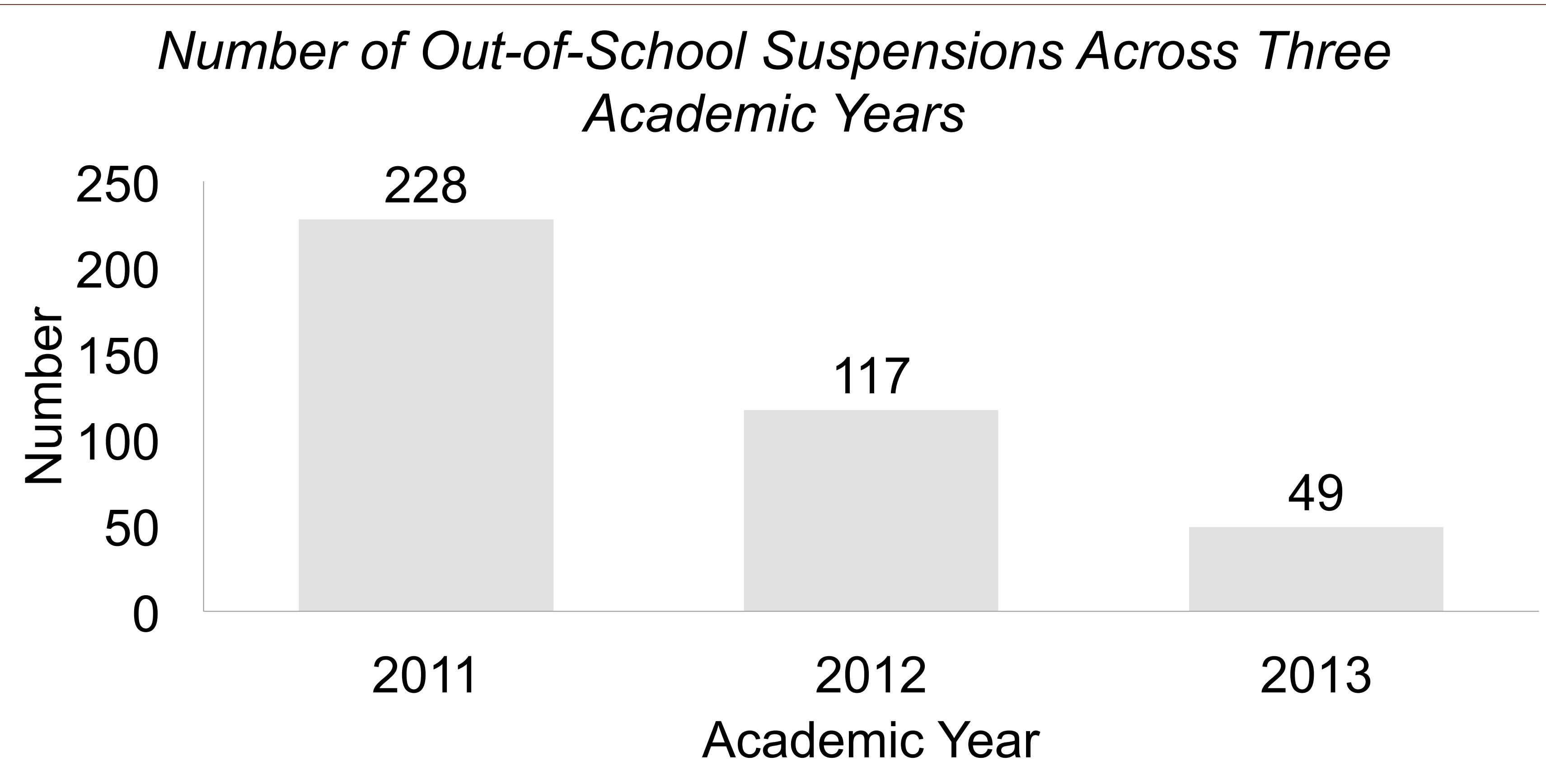
A summative program evaluation was completed for an urban school in which restorative justice was implemented over the course of two years.

Two hypothesizes were tested:

- Restorative justice is related to reductions in out-of-school suspension.
- Restorative justice is related to reductions in the discipline gap.

RESULTS

Results validate previous research findings, as restorative justice is related to reductions in out-of-school suspension rates. Further, the results reveal restorative justice is related to reductions in the size of the discipline gap.



Subgroups Discipline Gaps across Three Academic Years			
Race	2011	2012	2013
White-Black	0%	10%	5%
White-Hispanic	17%	4%	3%
White-Multiracial	12%	12%	3%

IMPLICATIONS

Restorative justice has produced promising outcomes for school communities across the nation and may serve as a less discriminatory alternative to punitive discipline, by, in part, minimizing the discipline gap (The Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2013).

It is recommended that future research on discipline policies and practices, either punitive or restorative, discuss the impact such policies and practices have on all racial / ethnic groups to ensure such policies and practices provide equal opportunity to all members of the student population.

Moreover, additional research connecting restorative practices in schools to reductions in the size of the discipline gap is needed to validate the current findings.

REFERENCES

National Association of School Psychologist (2012). *Fair and effective discipline for all students: Best practice strategies for educators*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologist. Retrieved from http://www.naspcenter.org/factsheets/effdiscip_fs.html

The Center for Civil Rights Remedies. (2013). *A summary of new research closing the school discipline gap*. Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project.